



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A Sunlit Clearing

the conventionally poetic. The tone is muted, always in a low key. There are no new words, no significant digressions, no discoveries. But one has a sense of having gone into a woman's heart, found it lovely and understandable, and come out satisfied with womankind. The tiptoe of rapture, however, is not there. *Two and a Child* is perhaps representative:

Does the spring night call little boys
As it calls their wild young mothers?
But what can a child know of us—or others?
He has different joys.
A tree that bends and almost smothers
Two in the road who clasp and quiver,
To him is only a swing by the river—
One of his outdoor toys.

Put him to bed and let us flee
Out in the night with other lovers.
It will not be long till he discovers
What's known to you and me.
And then when a destined maiden hovers
Near for what only he can give her . . .
No! Close the door. What makes me shiver?
I will stay here. Let me be.

Pearl Andelson

TARNISHED GOLD

Paul Verlaine, by Harold Nicolson. Houghton Mifflin Co.

This book is a dispassionate appraisal of the life and work of the greatest French symbolist poet. The reader who delights in a good biography should follow step by step through his dark byways of struggle this poet of the

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

“shifty Mongolian eyes,” should apprehend his pitiful weaknesses and failures. He was like other boys constitutionally, although perhaps handicapped by the fact that he was the only child of parents who were already middle-aged when he was born. It is interesting to read of his days of schooling, of how at eighteen he obtained his degree at the Sorbonne, “like other ordinary French schoolboys, with no brilliance, but quite creditably.” Mr. Nicolson tells us that in general Verlaine’s childhood had little effect upon his future development. The great factor in his life was alcohol, and this had not menaced him before the age of eighteen.

Verlaine’s life is the story of hopes and disappointments not unknown to other poets. But in his case the green of absinthe spread its taint over everything. He made great efforts at reform, notably once when for a year the influence of his young wife kept him sober. But the evil days returned invariably, and he became an habitual inebriate. It is hard to believe that in spite of the devils which were dragging him down his literary output did not seem to suffer, and that some of his most beautiful poems were born of these times.

And yet many of those which he wrote before this period have touched the human heart more poignantly than those of his maturer years; indeed in the last few years of his life his work sometimes showed Symbolism gone wrong—it was so steeped in intimate details as to be banal. But Verlaine at his best can throw us into an

atmosphere: if he writes about a mist, the hair feels wet with mist; if he writes of a garden we actually inhale the warm perfume, so subtly does he use intimacy, suggestion, association—the fundamentals of Symbolism. Other poetry has had these qualities, from the Greeks down; but, as Mr. Nicholson points out: "The Symbolists were the first to raise what had been an accidental virtue in others to the level of a doctrine for themselves." And he says also: "Verlaine did not invent Symbolism—he certainly did not direct its future development; but he was able at the psychological moment to catch and reflect the floating aspiration, and to give to it a definite cadence and a form."

A comparatively large portion of the book is devoted to the life of Arthur Rimbaud, and after reading these chapters we realize that to have given less space to the subject would have been to omit what is a valuable contribution to a true understanding of Verlaine's character. Mr. Nicholson has scant liking for Rimbaud, and his picture of this writer is not attractive. A large, red-fisted boy, with filthy hair that hung down lank between his shoulders, a snub nose and a damp fleshy mouth. He regards his entrance into the life of Verlaine as the greatest influence for evil that ever came near it. He tells us how Rimbaud forced himself upon Verlaine, how Verlaine forced Rimbaud upon his literary intimates in Paris—a very tactless performance, and how he dragged him to gatherings where he behaved like the boor he was and

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

from which he was promptly excluded. He became linked with all his friend's doings: he drank with him, helped him to spend his poor mother's capital, left him when there were no resources, and reappeared when he found it to his profit to do so; and he enticed him on the fateful and ever to be regretted trip to London.

Yet the most enthusiastic followers of Rimbaud cannot accuse Mr. Nicolson of having failed to estimate his work at its true value. In speaking of the *Bateau Ivre* he calls it an astounding production:

That is should be the work of a boy of sixteen is well-nigh incredible. In the glare of its inspiration the glib architecture of the Parnassians, the cadence of Verlaine's own poetry, assume but a paltry complexion. No wonder that the generation of today looks for stimulus to Rimbaud rather than to Verlaine or even Mallarmé—to Rimbaud, who at nineteen was forever to fling literature behind him.

He designates *Saison en Enfer* as an acid human document, and speaks at length of *Les Illuminations*, which, after the former, is most typical of Rimbaud's "unpleasing genius." *Aube*, in this collection, he considers to be as fine a prose poem as exists in any language.

Mr. Nicolson explains that he had hoped at first to give in an appendix a translation of the poems quoted in the text. We are glad that he abandoned the plan. Doubtless he, if anyone, could express Verlaine's poetry in English. But attempts by others to render into our language even French poets more easily translated are almost sure to be disappointing, few of the results rising above libretto English. Mr. Nicolson has decided wisely,

Tarnished Gold

and it is a pleasure to find that he has given us almost all of the poems which are the most exquisite or the most characteristic in the tongue in which they were meant to exist. The author says: "Verlaine of all poets is too elusive to admit of translation, and above all of a literal translation into English prose." This is what I have maintained whenever I have spoken of Verlaine's work in other articles in this magazine. The peculiar music is purely an emanation of his own atmosphere—perhaps more so than in the case of any other foreign poet. His syncopation is of the sort to be found in no other language than his own. To omit it, or to try to approach its like, could hardly fail to be a distortion.

This whole book is carried through with a subtle, yet firm and often audacious touch. Scholarly it certainly is, but not in the sense of that word which restricts the pedagogic mind. There are a few inaccuracies—the American reader will be surprised to learn that Stuart Merrill is an Englishman!—and there are occasional phrases which startle; but these are slight flaws.

The author bares Verlaine's weaknesses and gives his mitigating characteristics, without a hint as to his own opinions regarding them. He lays the facts before you, and it is for you to conclude. He tells us, incidentally, in the Rimbaud chapters, that Verlaine had no spark of jealousy or personal ambition, and that he flung himself with real generosity into the task of helping other poets. Those who derive from this poet's work only an aroma of

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

the wine-shop, who picture him first of all as a vulgar sot, will have a change of heart after reading this biography. Paul Verlaine had noble traits, he had lovable traits; and these went into his poetry. *Agnes Lee Freer*

SLAVIC POETRY

Modern Russian Poetry, selected and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

Anthology of Modern Slavonic Literature, translated by P. Selver. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Modern Czech Poetry, translated by P. Selver. E. P. Dutton & Co.

An Anthology of Yugoslav Poetry. Edited by Dr. B. S. Stanoyevich. Richard G. Badger.

The vigor and elegantly tutored violence of the Russian ballet, the drastic investigations and discoveries of Russian fiction, the naive splendor of Russian painting, and Russian music with its delicate French soul in a rioting body, may lead you to expect, in Russian poetry, something equally vivid and fresh, a balancing surprise. You may be prepared, as I was, to add to the French and English—the only modern literatures, so far as I can discover, that have a life and character of their own and enjoy the distinction of possessing masterpieces—a Russian literature embodying that figment of the European imagination, the Slavic Soul.